Bangladesh says ICC considering request to move their World Cup games from India

DHAKA: The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said on Wednesday that the sport's global governing body, the International Cricket Council, is considering their request to move their Twenty20 World Cup matches out of India over safety concerns.

Amid fraught relations between the two countries, Indian Premier League (IPL) side Kolkata Knight Riders said at the weekend that the country's cricket board (BCCI) had told them to drop Bangladesh bowler Mustafizur Rahman, prompting anger in Dhaka.

Bangladesh's interim government has since banned broadcasts of the IPL, and the BCB have refused to play their World Cup matches in India, which is co-hosting the February 7 to March 8 event with Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play three World Cup matches in Kolkata next month.

"In its communication, the ICC has reiterated its commitment to ensuring the full and uninterrupted participation of the Bangladesh team in the tournament," the BCB said.

"The ICC has conveyed its willingness to work closely with the BCB to address the concerns raised and has assured that the boards inputs will be welcomed and duly considered as part of the detailed security planning for the event."

The statement added that BCB would "continue constructive engagement with the ICC and relevant event authorities", seeking an "affable and practical solution that ensures the smooth and successful participation of the team".

The ICC have not commented.

Some media reports have suggested the ICC, which is headed by former Indian board chief Jay Shah, had told Bangladesh they must play in India or forfeit the matches.

However, the BCB said reports of such an ultimatum were "completely false" and that it was "firmly committed to placing the highest priority on the safety, security and well-being" of the team.

Mustafizur was snapped up at IPL auction in December by the Knight Riders for more than $1 million. But he was let go on the Indian cricket board's "advice" after what it called "recent developments".

Political relations between India and Bangladesh soured after a mass uprising in Dhaka in 2024 toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, a close ally of New Delhi.

India's foreign ministry last month condemned what it called "unremitting hostility against minorities" in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Hundreds protested near Bangladesh's High Commission in New Delhi last month after a Hindu factory worker was beaten and set on fire in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district over blasphemy allegations.

Bangladesh's interim leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, has accused India of exaggerating the scale of the violence.—Agencies

Lategan leads Dakar Rally, champion Al-Rajhi withdraws

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Dakar Rally champion Yazeed Al-Rajhi declared an end to his title defence and withdrew on Wednesday as South African Henk Lategan dominated the fourth stage for Toyota and took over at the top.

Al-Rajhi had been struggling from the start in his customer entry Toyota Hilux, and was already 19th when he withdrew with technical issues 234km into the 452km part of a two-day marathon stage around Al-Ula.

"Sadly, our Dakar 2026 journey ends here," he posted on Facebook. "We'll come back stronger next year." The Saudi explained later that he had lost half an hour with two punctures and, with nearly half the stage remaining until the bivouac and having to go slow with no further spare available, had called it a day.

It ended a difficult year for the Saudi since he won last year, with Al-Rajhi crashing in Jordan last April and breaking two vertebrae. He returned to competition only in September.

Lategan, last year's overall runner-up, took his fifth career stage win and led Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah by three minutes and 55 seconds.

"Yesterday, we had a total of nine punctures. It's unbelievable. I think that's a record in three days. I was lost," the factory Toyota driver said, his happiness tempered by missing his son's sixth birthday.

"I didn't know what to do on the rocks, whether to slow down or not, attack or not. Today I decided to forget all that and just go for it. It's a lottery anyway."

Al-Attiyah, a five-times Dakar winner now with the Dacia Sandriders team, was second in the stage — more than seven minutes behind Lategan — to move up from 10th overnight.

Ford's Mattias Ekstrom was in third place overall with teammate and four-times Dakar winner Carlos Sainz fourth and nearly 16 minutes off the lead.

Ford's overnight leader Mitch Guthrie of the United States dropped to 13th.

In the motorcycle category, Spaniard Tosha Schareina took the lead for Honda from Australia's defending champion Daniel Sanders, who dropped to third on his KTM. American Ricky Brabec was second.

Schareina and Brabec finished the stage in a Honda one-two-three with American Skyler Howes third and Sanders fifth.—Reuters

DAMBULLA: Sri Lankan opener Pathum Nissanka looks on after playing a shot during the first Twenty20 International against Pakistan at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium on Wednesday.—AFP

Shadab stars on return as Pakistan beat Sri Lanka in first Twenty20

DAMBULLA: Featuring for Pakistan for the first time since June last year, Shadab Khan impressed with the ball, teaming up with Abrar Ahmed as Pakistan beat Sri Lanka by six wickets in the opening fixture of the three-match Twenty20 International series at the Rangiri Dambulla Cricket Stadium on Wednesday.

The all-rounder took two wickets, while Abrar hunted three victims to restrict Sri Lanka to a paltry 128-run total before Sahibzada Farhan's half century helped Pakistan chase down the target with 20 balls to spare.

Shadab gave away only 25 runs in his four overs, bagging both his wickets in his very first over and could have gone on to take a third had it not been for a dropped catch later on.

Coming into bowl in the seventh over, after Mohammad Wasim and Salman Mirza's pace — that accounted for a wicket for each — saw Sri Lanka post 35-2 in the powerplay, Shadab trapped a sweeping Kusal Mendis lbw and induced an inside edge off Dhananjaya de Silva's bat for wicket-keeper Usman Khan to take a good catch.

With Sri Lanka looking to break the stranglehold while at 59-4 by the halfway stage, it was an opportunity for Abrar to pounce on. The mystery spinner deceived Charith Asalanka into playing a googly across, only to be caught behind, leaving Sri Lanka reeling at 72-5 halfway through the 12th over.

The incoming Wanindu Hasaranga initiated a counterattack of sorts lofting Abrar for a boundary in the 14th over. Liyanage joined in a slap off Mohammad Nawaz through the covers before dispatching the left-arm spinner past long-on, bringing up the 100-run mark for Sri Lanka.

Luck followed for Liyanage as an edge flew off his bat for another boundary as 16 runs came in the 15th over.

Hasaranga targetted Abrar once again, clubbing him straight down the ground for another four, but holed the spinner to Fakhar Zaman at deep cover to depart for 18 off 12, ending the only partnership that looked to threaten Pakistan.

Liyanage (40 off 31) followed suit in the 18th, finding Nawaz in the deep off Abrar (3-25) as he tried to clear the long-on fence.

Salman Mirza (3-18) returned to dismiss Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka and the incoming Dushmantha Chameera before Wasim (2-7) wrapped up the first innings proceedings.

The left-hander was castled by Theekshana but only after having hit three fours and a six — a lofted drive over cover — for his 18-ball 24. Sahibzada, on the other end, had used brute power to dispatch Chameera for sixes down the ground and over square-leg.

"Comebacks in internationals are tough because you start from zero," Shadab said after the match. "Bowling and batting is going well, trying to do the simple things.

"The surface was helping definitely, but in cricket you have to always assess the conditions. Here, fuller was better than good length."

Pakistan, in response, took off with a flurry of brilliant attacking shots by openers Saim Ayub and Sahibzada lead the side to a 59-1 by the end of the powerplay, with Saim departing on the penultimate ball of the sixth over.

Sahibzada continued the onslaught, welcoming Chameera back with a straight drive for four more before captain Salman Ali Agha, having just joined him, danced down the ground to play Hasaranga's leg-spin over his head for another boundary.

The skipper pushed Theekshana for his second boundary in the next over as Pakistan posted 92-1 by the halfway stage, but holed a juicy full toss by Hasranga to long-on to depart for 16 off 10.

Sahibzada (51 off 36) brought up his third half century in five matches with a cut for three off Chameera in the 12th over, reaching the milestone in 35 balls. But the right-hander perished three balls later, finding Shanaka at mid-off off Chameera.

Pakistan received yet another blow when Fakhar was stumped off Dhananjaya de Silva with 23 runs needed off 40 balls.

The incoming Shadab, however, brought Pakistan within touching distance of a win with a square-drive and a pull for consecutive boundaries off Chameera in the 15th over before Pakistan crossed the finish line with 20 balls to spare.—Agencies

Scoreboard

SRI LANKA:

P. Nissanka c Nawaz b Wasim	12
K. Mishara c Salman b Mirza	0
K. Mendis lbw b Shadab	14
D. de Silva c Usman b Shadab	10
C. Asalanka c Usman b Abrar	18
J. Liyanage c Nawaz b Abrar	40
W. Hasaranga c Fakhar b Abrar	18
D. Shanaka c Faheem b Mirza	12
D. Chameera c Shadab b Mirza	0
M. Theekshana c Usman b Wasim	1
N. Thushara not out	0
EXTRAS (LB-3)	3
TOTAL (all out, 19.2 overs)	128

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-13 (Mishara), 2-15 (Nissanka), 3-37 (Mendis), 4-38 (Dhananjaya), 5-72 (Asalanka), 6-110 (Hasaranga), 7-127 (Liyanage), 8-127 (Shanaka), 9-128 (Chameera)

BOWLING: Mirza 4-0-18-3; Wasim 2.2-0-7-2; Faheem 1-0-10-0; Shadab 4-0-25-2; Nawaz 4-0-40-0; Abrar 4-0-25-3

PAKISTAN:

Sahibzada Farhan c Shanaka b Chameera	51
Saim Ayub b Theekshana	24
Salman Ali Agha c Nissanka b Hasaranga	16
Fakhar Zaman st Mendis b Dhananjaya	5
Usman Khan not out	7
Shadab Khan not out	18
EXTRAS (LB-5, W-3)	8
TOTAL (for four wickets, 16.4 overs)	129

DID NOT BAT: Mohammad Nawaz, Faheem Ashraf, Mohammad Wasim, Salman Mirza, Abrar Ahmed

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-59 (Saim), 2-94 (Salman), 3-101 (Sahibzada), 4-106 (Fakhar)

BOWLING: Thushara 2-0-31-0 (1w); Theekshana 4-0-31-1; Chameera 4-0-34-1 (2w); Hasaranga 4-0-17-1; Dhananjaya 2-0-4-1; Asalanka 0.4-0-7-0

RESULT: Pakistan won by wix wickets.

MAN-OF-THE-MATCH: Shadab Khan

SERIES: Pakistan lead three-match series 1-0.

Noor keeps Pakistan's flag flying at Karachi Open

KARACHI: Having seen two of his compatriots fight valiantly before being knocked out, the onus was on Noor Zaman to keep flying Pakistan's flag in the quarter-finals of the biggest squash tournament on home soil in two decades.

The under-23 world champion did not flinch, not even when he was two games down, and launched a stirring comeback to level the tie against eighth seed Fares Dessouky before he was awarded a conduct match in the decisive fifth after a debate between his Egyptian opponent and the match referee which saw him complete the last-eight line-up at the Karachi Open on Wednesday.

The hour-long duel ended 8-11, 9-11, 11-5, 11-9, 7-3 in Noor's favour to give the home crowd some cheer after they had seen Mohammad Ashab Irfan and Nasir Iqbal go down bravely earlier in the day.

World number 47 Ashab gave a huge scare to top-seeded Egyptian Karim Abdel Gawad in a 56-minute battle featuring brutal rallies with both players pushing each other to the limit.

Ashab won the opening two games and was 5-2 up in the third game before the 34-year-old Gawad, ranked fourth in the world, drew on his experience to win 7-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-5, 11-5.

"Ashab was my training partner when I was in Houston, staying there for the full summer in 2023, so I knew how tough it was going to be today," Gawad, who advanced to a last-eight tie against Malaysian Eain Yow Ng, said.

Yow, the seventh seed, downed Spain Iker Pajeres 11-6, 11-9, 11-8.

Nasir, who got a wildcard to feature in the tournament, saw his journey come to an end after he was felled 6-11, 11-7, 7-11, 5-11 by Egypt's fifth seed Mohamad Zakaria in a 53-minute encounter.

Zakaria advances to a clash against Hong Kong's Alex Lau, who stunned third-seeded Egyptian Youseff Ibrahim 11-9, 4-11, 11-1, 7-11, 11-8.

Noor is in the bottom half of the draw and he faces another Egyptian, Mohamed ElShorbagy, after the fourth seed swept past compatriot Yahya Elnawasany 11-4, 11-5, 11-3.

Second seed Marwan ElShorbagy is the highest-ranked player in the bottom half of the draw and he raced past Frenchman Toufik Mekhalfi 11-4, 11-7, 11-5.

His quarter-final opponent will be Aly Abou Elenein with the sixth seed also having an easy outing on Wednesday as he swept past Yahya Elnawasany 11-4, 11-5, 11-3 in an all-Egyptian clash.

On the women's side, top seeded Egyptian Amina Orfi crushed compatriot Haya Ali 11-1, 11-7, 11-2 and next faces Malaysian Aira Azman, who beat Nour Aboulmakarim 11-4, 11-8, 13-11.

Fourth seed Nada Abbas and fifth seed Farida Mohamed came through all-Egyptian clashes to set up a last-eight meeting. Abbas overcame Mariam Metwally 9-11, 11-9, 11-8, 8-11, 11-8 while Mohamed eased past Amina El Rihany 11-7, 11-5, 12-10.

On the other half of the draw, second seed Siva Subramaniam dropped a game on her way to beating Nadine Shahin 11-2, 8-11, 11-8, 11-8. She will meet England's Lucy Turmel after the seventh seed knocked out compatriot Torrie Malik 11-9, 11-2, 11-7.

Third seed Fayrouz Aboulkheir was taken the full distance by Hong Kong's Chan Sing Yuk before she prevailed 11-5, 9-11, 10-12, 11-5, 13-11. She meets eight seed Aifa Azman for a spot in the semis after the Malaysian bounced back from losing the opening game to beat Egypt's Nardine Garas 5-11, 11-9, 11-5, 11-9.—Sports Reporter

Shaheen to resume bowling from next week

LAHORE: Pakistan's One-day International captain Shaheen Shah Afridi, suffering from a flare-up of his old knee injury, is hopeful of resuming bowling from next week.

The national team's pace spearhead was featuring in Australia's Big Bash League when he suffered the injury but he said on Wednesday that it "wasn't so serious".

"There is swelling on my knee and it will be fine soon and I will re-start bowling from next week," Shaheen told reporters at an event arranged by Pakistan Super League franchise Lahore Qalandars.

"My rehab is going on under the medical team of the Pakistan Cricket Board at the National Cricket Academy," added the Qalandars skipper.

The left-armer first suffered the injury on his knee during the tour of Sri Lanka in 2022 and subsequently ruled him out of the T20 World Cup that year.

Shaheen's performances for Brisbane Heat in the four BBL matches he played weren't satisfactory before he suffered the injury which saw PCB call him back to the country for rehabilitation.

Shaheen was hopeful that Pakistan will be able to put up a good show at the upcoming T20 World Cup, which begins next month with the national team playing all their matches in Sri Lanka.

"We've played good cricket in the last year and the team is currently playing a series in Sri Lanka which will be useful for preparations," he said.—Sports Reporter

Bethell's maiden century stalls Australia victory march

SYDNEY: Jacob Bethell fulfilled his rich potential with a chanceless maiden Test century to lead an England rearguard action on the fourth day of the fifth Test on Wednesday but Australia still looked firmly set for victory and a 4-1 series triumph.

Anchored by Bethell's 142 not out, England reached the close of play at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 302 for eight with a modest lead of 119 runs over Australia's bumper first-innings tally of 567.

If England are to defy Australia to close out the series on a relatively good pitch, they are likely to have to do so without the bowling of captain Ben Stokes, who pulled up with a groin issue in the first hour of the day.

"He's moving pretty gingerly," Bethell told reporters. "So I don't think that bodes too well for him bowling tomorrow."

Bethell has looked a strong addition to the team after coming into the side in place of Ollie Pope for England's fourth Test victory in Melbourne last week.

The 22-year-old confirmed his promise on Wednesday, holding England's innings together in a string of big partnerships — 81 runs with opener Ben Duckett, 102 with Harry Brook and 45 with Jamie Smith.

Playing only his sixth test, Bethell spent a nervous couple of overs on 99 before reaching the most important milestone in the game with a crunching four.

"It's pretty special. It's not really sunk in yet," Bethell, who had his parents in the stands and raised his bat towards them as he passed the milestone, told reporters. "To do that and have the family there was very special," said the left-hander. "My dad was a cricketer so he knows how it feels to be out there batting, but I don't think that stops him from getting any less nervous."

It was not just Bethell's maiden Test ton but the only one he has scored in red-ball cricket, with his previous best 96 against New Zealand.

"We had to graft hard out there and ideally we'd be a couple wickets less," the left-hander said. "But yeah, 119 ahead. I think we've got a chance if we get it up to 180-190, potentially, tomorrow.

"I'm going to have to be smart around how we let Pottsy [Matthew Potts] and [Josh] Tongue come in and what they face. But I'm just going to have to hit the gaps. It's a big outfield, so there are plenty of gaps and I just have to try and hit them."

His partners fared less well.

Duckett was bowled by Michael Neser for 42 soon after lunch when he looked well-set, Brook was ousted lbw for the same score on an Australian DRS appeal, and Smith was farcically run-out for 26.

Stokes lasted five balls and scored one run when he did finally come out to bat, caught in the slips off a thick edge to leave his team clinging on at 267-7 and give Australia all-rounder Beau Webster his third wicket of the day.

Webster (3-51) had earlier shattered English hopes of giving Australia a fourth-innings run chase that might truly test them when he removed Brook and Will Jacks in the space of three balls with his part-time off spin.

"I certainly didn't think I would [impact] with spin this game," said Webster, who is more usually employed as a seamer. "There was a bit of wear and tear there from Starcy's [Mitchell Starc] footmarks. And we managed to make the most of it in that session."

All of Australia's bowlers were unremitting in their effort and application with Starc removing opener Zak Crawley lbw for one with the fifth ball of the innings to claim his 29th wicket of the series.

Crawley did not offer a shot as the ball thumped into his pad and England's opening partnership failed to survive the opening over for the fourth time in the series.

Scott Boland, remarkably not even a first-choice selection when all Australia's quicks are fit, was again uber-reliable and ousted danger man Joe Root for six in an lbw decision confirmed by DRS.

The 36-year-old returned to take the last wicket of the day — his 20th of the series — by inducing a thick edge off Brydon Carse that Steve Smith gobbled up in the slips.

One bright note for England at the backend of the series has been the bowling of seamer Josh Tongue (3-97) and he was again to the fore as the visitors mopped up the last three Australian wickets in the first hour of play.

He removed Smith for 138 and Starc for five before many in another bumper crowd of 42,864 had taken their seats.

Australia's last batsman, Boland, edged the ball to the slips off the first delivery he faced from Jacks, leaving Webster 71 not out.—Agencies

ENGLAND batter Jacob Bethell blocks during the fifth Ashes Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday.—Reuters

Scoreboard

ENGLAND (1st Innings) 384 (J. Root 160, H. Brook 84; M. Neser 4-60)

AUSTRALIA (1st innings, overnight 518-7):

T. Head lbw Bethell	163
J. Weatherald lbw Stokes	21
M. Labuschagne c Bethell b Stokes	48
M. Neser c Smith b Carse	24
S. Smith c Smith b Tongue	138
U. Khawaja lbw Carse	17
A. Carey c Bethell b Tongue	16
C. Green c Duckett b Carse	37
B. Webster not out	71
M. Starc b Tongue	5
S. Boland c Brook b Jacks	0
EXTRAS (B-4, LB-14, NB-5, W-4)	27
TOTAL (all out, 133.5 overs)	567

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-57 (Weatherald), 2-162 (Labuschagne), 3-234 (Neser), 4-288 (Head), 5-339 (Khawaja), 6-366 (Carey), 7-437 (Green), 8-544 (Smith), 9-564 (Starc)

BOWLING: Carse 27-2-130-3 (1w); Potts 25-1-141-0 (2w); Tongue 30-0-97-3; Stokes 27.4-6-95-2 (5nb); Jacks 8.5-0-34-1; Bethell 15.2-1-52-1 (1w)

ENGLAND (2nd Innings):

Z. Crawley lbw Starc	1
B. Duckett b Neser	42
J. Bethell not out	142
J. Root lbw Boland	6
H. Brook lbw Webster	42
W. Jacks c Green b Webster	0
J. Smith run out	26
B. Stokes c Smith b Webster	1
B. Carse c Smith b Boland	16
M. Potts not out	0
EXTRAS (B-9, LB-7, NB-2, PEN-5, W-3)	26
TOTAL (for eight wickets, 75 overs)	302

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-4 (Crawley), 2-85 (Duckett), 3-117 (Root), 4-219 (Brook), 5-219 (Jacks), 6-264 (Smith), 7-267 (Stokes), 8-297 (Carse)

STILL TO BAT: J. Tongue

BOWLING: Starc 14-2-61-1; Boland 19-4-34-2; Neser 16-0-55-1 (1nb); Green 6-0-40-0; Webster 13-1-51-3 (1nb); Head 4-0-25-0 (1w); Labuschagne 3-0-15-0 (2w)